

Short Communications

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Bald Eagle Predation on Common Loon Chick

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ABSTRACT.—We report predation of a Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) chick by an adult Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) in northern Wisconsin. Received 27 Feb. 1998, accepted 26 Sept. 1998.

Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) chicks may be vulnerable to aerial and underwater predators, including Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), Common Raven (*Corvus corax*), Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*), snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*), northern pike (*Esox niger*), and muskellunge (*Esox masquinongy*; Yonge 1981, McIntyre 1988, J. Wilson and M. Meyer, pers. comm.). However, few observers have actually observed such predation (McIntyre 1988). Here we describe the first documented observation of a Bald Eagle killing a loon chick.

On 26 July 1996, while collecting data on parental effort on a pair of color-marked adult Common Loons at the Turtle Flambeau Flowage in north central Wisconsin (46° 0' N, 90° 10' W), we observed an adult Bald Eagle capture a 15 day-old loon chick. Loon chicks are most prone to predation during the first two weeks after hatching, but continue to be vulnerable up to 4–5 weeks of age (Yonge 1981, McIntyre 1983, pers. obs.). At 10:00 CST an adult eagle circled the territory several times before perching near the top a lone, 8 m tall tamarack (*Larix laricina*) on a small island (0.1 ha). An adult eagle(s) had been observed within the loons' territory on 2 previous occasions (19, 22 July). When the resting adult loons saw the eagle, they wailed and

tremoloed several times. The chick, initially with the adults, disappeared from our sight, apparently beneath some overhanging alder (*Alnus* sp.) along the island's edge. By 10:20 the adult loons stopped vocalizing; the male resumed foraging dives, and the female remained alert on the surface. However, at 10:30, two non-resident loons intruded on the established pair's territory, triggering aggressive interactions for 10–12 min until the intruding pair left the area. The territorial adults remained alert on the surface with the chick still out of sight.

At 10:58 the eagle swooped down and grabbed something offshore near the island (because of the density of the alder we could not positively identify it). The adult loons immediately started giving 3-note wails and 3-note tremolos, and the male let out several yodels. At 11:00 the eagle attempted to fly with the loon chick (now visible) in its talons, but had trouble becoming airborne in the alder thicket. Thirty seconds later, the eagle attained flight without the chick in its talons and returned to its previous perch in the tamarack. It remained there for 10 min before it flew from the area. The adult loons continued to wail and tremolo for 20 min while swimming around the island. They remained in the area until 12:25, then swam about 300 m to the other side of their territory. We searched for the chick 3 hours later and found it dead, with puncture wounds to the head and a crushed skull. We skinned and mounted the chick as a study specimen, but did not record its body mass.

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Territorial takeover in Common Loons (*Gavia immer*)

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ABSTRACT.—Breeding Common Loons (*Gavia immer*) are well known for vigorously defending their territory from conspecifics. Territory holders are not previously known to be supplanted by loons during the breeding season. I observed a pair of adult Common Loons displace a resident pair from their territory shortly after a territorial conflict; the takeover coincided with the death of the resident loons' chick caused by an adult Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*). Received 27 Feb. 1998, accepted 7 Sept. 1998.

Common Loons (*Gavia immer*) are philopatric, but territory switching occurs infrequently (Piper et al. 1997; Evers, Reaman, Kaplan, and Paruk, unpubl. data). Our understanding of territory switching in Common Loons remains largely unknown (Piper et al. 1997). In 1995–1997, while coordinating studies of parental effort and social flocking in Common Loons at the Turtle Flambeau Flowage in northern Wisconsin (46° 00' N, 90° 10' W), I observed a territory takeover.

The Turtle Flambeau Flowage is a large impoundment (5798 ha) that contains 24–26 loon territories. Territories are generally well delineated by coves or islands, but there are several places where the presence of small islands makes it difficult to distinguish individual territorial boundaries.

On 26 July 1996, at 10:30 CST a pair of unbanded loons entered the territory (Long Is-

land, LI) of an established color-banded pair. All four birds moved behind an island and were out of sight for 2 min. A territorial bird (sex could not be determined because of an obstruction) “surface rushed” one of the intruders driving it onto an island with repeated bill thrusts. At 10:42, the territorial pair was reunited and the intruders were no longer in sight.

At 10:58, an adult Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) killed the resident pairs' 15 day-old chick (Paruk et al. 1999). At this age, loon chicks are still dependent upon adults for food and protection from predators (Dulin 1988, McIntyre 1988). The LI pair remained near the location where the eagle killed the chick until 12:25, at which time they swam to the other side of their territory. I searched the territory for the banded loons from 15:25–16:00, but did not observe them. Instead, I observed two unbanded loons in the territory.

On 27 July, I observed two unbanded, paired adults in the LI territory. The original pair was not observed on 27 July, but on 28 July an assistant spotted them several hundred meters south of their former territory. Throughout the rest of the summer, until 18 August, several observations ($n = 9$) confirmed that the original territorial pair had been supplanted by two unbanded individuals. The unbanded birds were observed foraging, resting and preening in the LI territory until the end of the observation period on 18 August.

Prior to the takeover, a pair of unbanded

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